

GREETINGS FROM **SOMEWHERE**

The
Mystery of
the Stolen Painting



BY HARPER PARIS • ILLUSTRATED BY MARCOS CALO

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CHAPTER 1

The City of Light

Ella Briar gazed out the airplane window. Down below, miles of glittering lights twinkled against the evening sky. "Look, Ethan!" she said to her twin brother.

"That must be Paris," Ethan replied. "It's awesome!"

"I think that's the Eiffel Tower," Ella said, pointing.

"Did you know that the Eiffel Tower is the tallest structure in Paris?" their dad, Andrew, called out from across the aisle. "It was built in 1889 for the world's fair."

"I see a river!" Ethan announced.



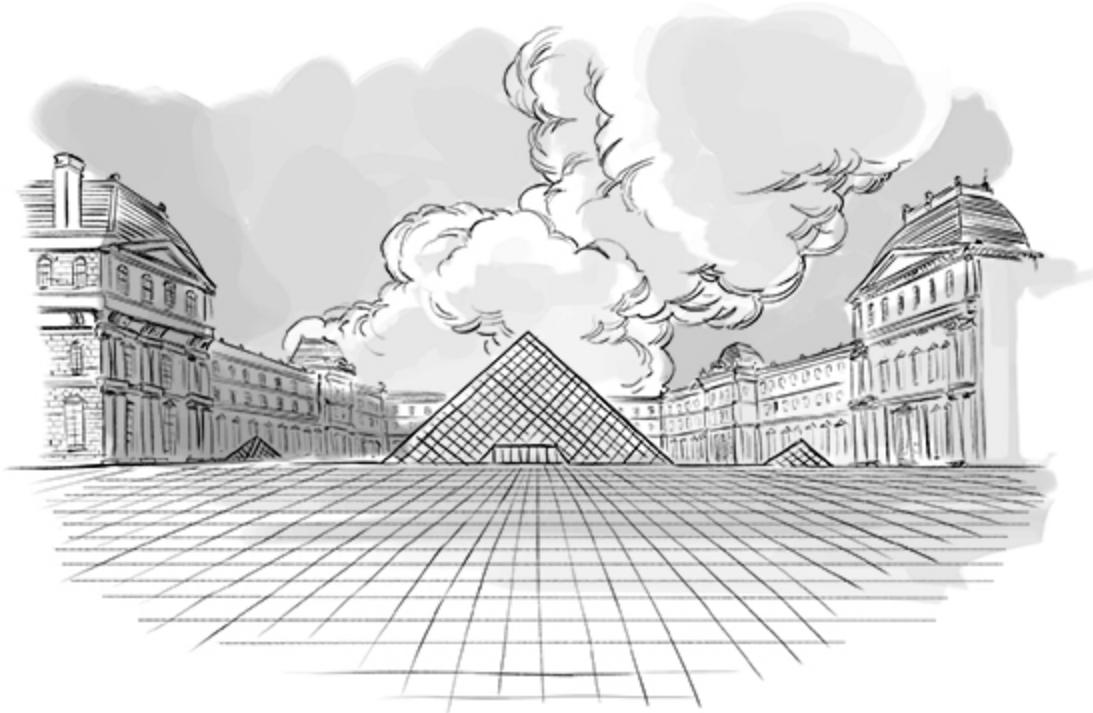
"That is probably the Seine," Mr. Briar guessed. "It divides Paris into two parts: the Right Bank and the Left Bank."

"We are staying in a lovely old neighborhood on the Right Bank," their mom, Josephine, said as she smoothed on lipstick. "There are a lot of fun shops there! And we'll be close to a famous museum called the Louvre."

Fun shops? A famous museum? The twins couldn't wait!



A short while later, their plane landed at the airport. The Briars took a taxi to the apartment they were renting. The building had no elevator, so they had to carry their suitcases up five flights of marble stairs. They were out of breath by the time they got to the top.



The climb was worth it, though. The apartment was enormous, with an elegant balcony that overlooked red rooftops and bustling cafés. Brightly lit boats cruised along the river. In the distance, the Eiffel Tower shimmered like a gold jewel.

Ella remembered from her dad's guidebook that Paris was often called the City of Light. Now she knew why!



Ethan ran straight to the biggest bedroom. “Dibs!” he shouted.

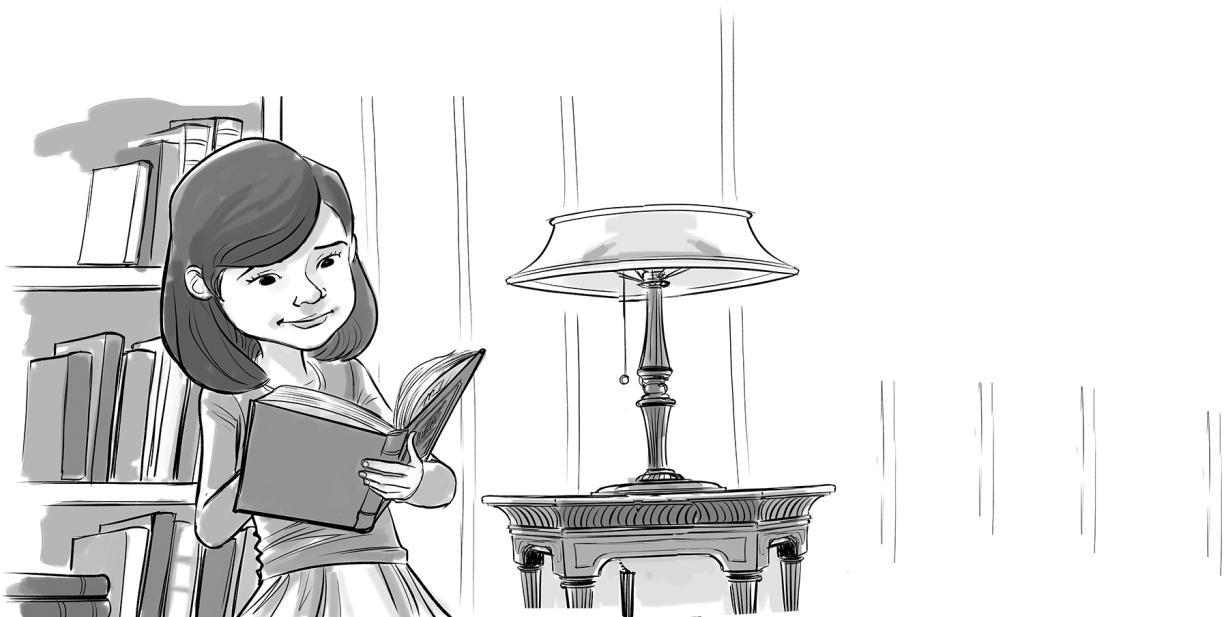
“Hey, not fair!” Ella protested.

“How about your father and I take this room?” Mrs. Briar suggested. “Ethan, there’s a green room down the hall with soccer posters. And, Ella, the purple room has lots of books in English.”

Ella loved books, and purple was her favorite color! She raced down the hallway with her suitcase and found her room. It had a canopy bed with a lavender bedspread. Black-and-white photographs of Paris covered the walls.



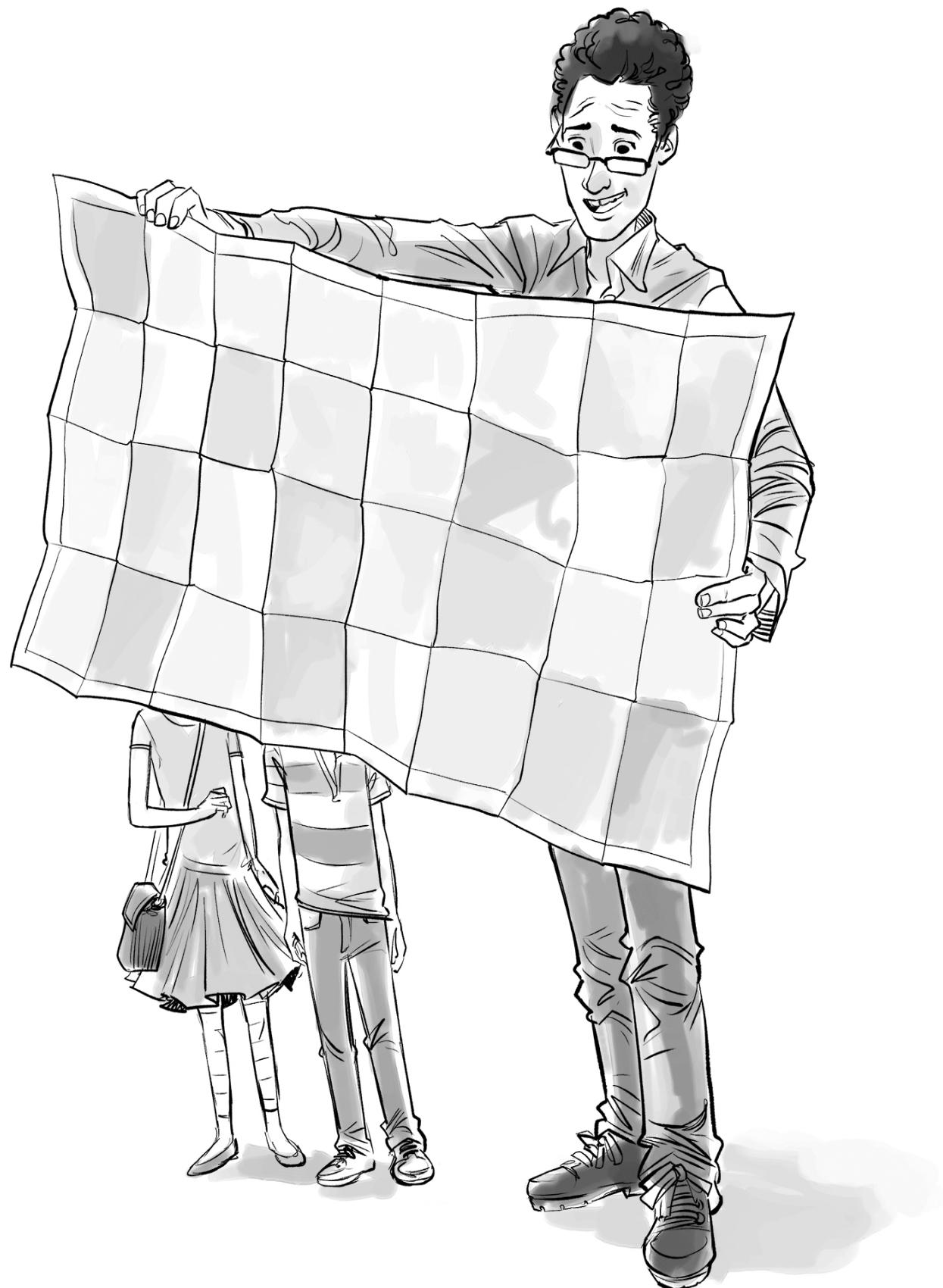
Next to the bed was a wooden bookshelf. Ella spotted a couple of books she'd already read, *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* and *Shiloh*. Tucked between them was a dusty old volume called *Les Secrets de Paris*.



Curious, she picked it up and flipped to the first page. It was all in French. However, someone had scribbled something in pencil. It was in English:

Paris is full of secret places that you will not find in any guidebook.

Ella shivered with excitement. What did that mean? Would she and Ethan stumble upon any of these secret places while *they* were in Paris?



CHAPTER 2

Strolling Through Paris

The next morning, the Briars headed out for a walk through the cobblestoned streets of Paris. First, they stopped at a neighborhood café for a quick breakfast. The twins loved the fresh orange juice and croissants, which were flaky rolls shaped like half-moons.

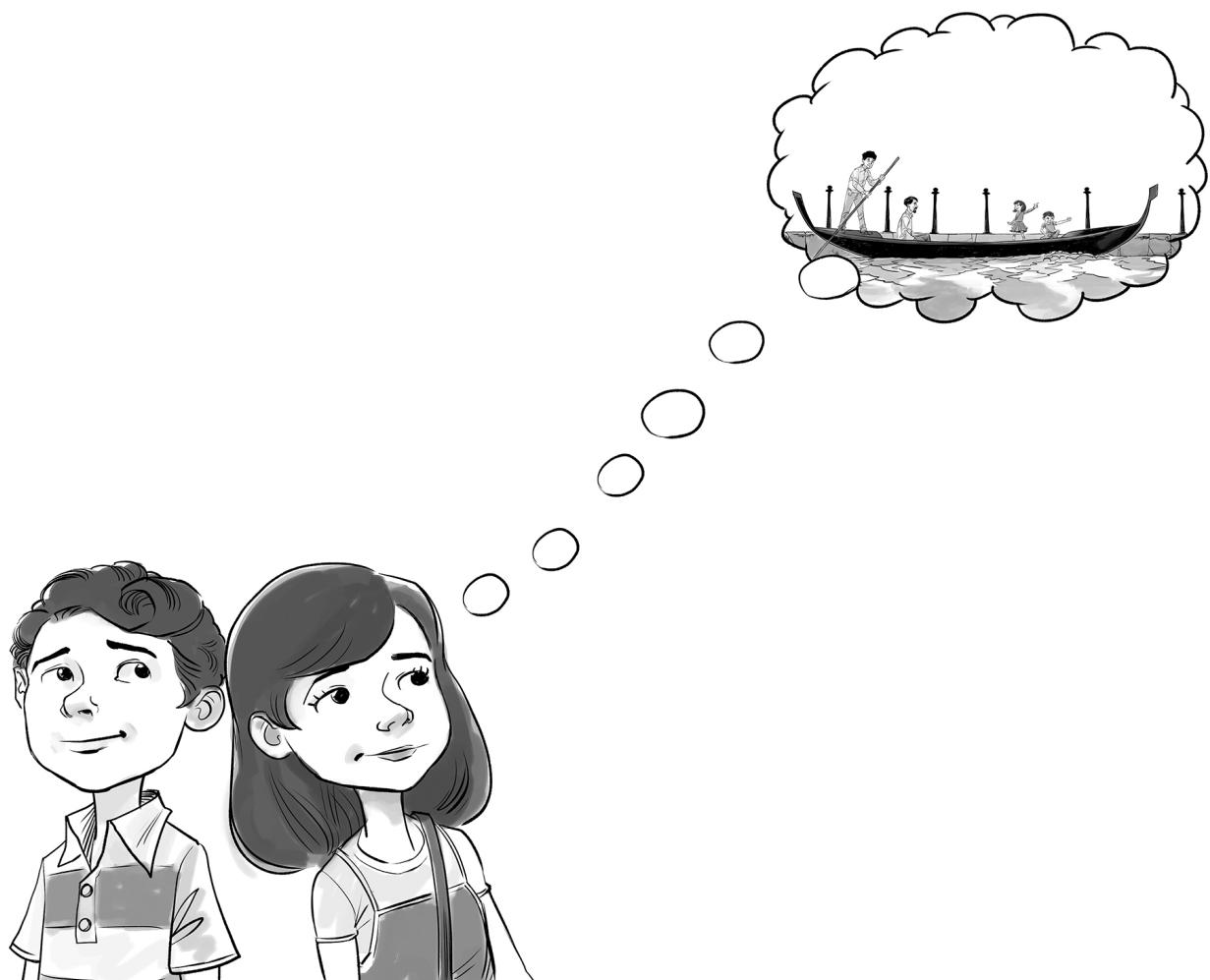
After breakfast, they went to several shops to buy supplies for their picnic lunch. They were going to have lunch at a park called the Luxembourg Gardens. They went to a *boulangerie* for bread. They went to a *fromagerie* for cheese. And finally, they went to a *pâtisserie* for pastries. Mrs. Briar put everything in a picnic basket she had found in their apartment.



"I've already planned a nice, winding route for us," Mr. Briar announced, holding up a crinkled map of Paris. "Oops. That's upside down. Here we go. Follow me, kids!"

Mr. Briar led the way. Mrs. Briar lagged behind as she took photos of the scenery and spoke into a tiny tape recorder.

Mrs. Briar was a travel writer. She and the family traveled to different foreign cities so she could write about it for her newspaper column, *Journeys with Jo!* While she worked, Mr. Briar took care of the twins and homeschooled them.



In the beginning, Ethan and Ella had not been happy about leaving Brooketon. They missed their house, their friends, their school, their second-grade teacher, Mrs. Applebaum, and most of all, their Grandpa Harry.

Still, their first stop—Venice, Italy—had been a lot of fun. The twins had even solved a mystery when a gondola went missing. And they really liked what they'd seen of Paris so far.

They crossed a short bridge and saw an enormous stone church.

"Kids, this is the Notre-Dame Cathedral," Mr. Briar explained. "See those statues up there that look like goblins with wings? They're called gargoyles, and they were put there as protection against evil." Mr. Briar was a history professor and knew lots of interesting facts.



Near Notre-Dame was a street full of tiny shops. A sweet, buttery smell was coming from one of them. "What's that yummy smell?" Ethan wondered out loud.

"That's a *crêperie*, or crepe shop. Crepes are thin pancakes with delicious ingredients rolled up inside, like chocolate and strawberries or ham and cheese," Mr. Briar replied.

"Can we get one? Can we get one?" Ella begged.

Mr. Briar laughed. "Maybe later. We don't want to spoil our appetites before our picnic!"



Soon, the family crossed back over the Seine on another, longer bridge. After a few blocks, they found themselves near a building that seemed to go on forever.

"Oh! This is the famous museum I mentioned last night—the Louvre!" Mrs. Briar said, snapping a picture. "Isn't it wonderful?"

"It used to be a fortress before it was a museum," Mr. Briar added.



Ethan could totally imagine soldiers inside, watching and waiting for enemy ships on the river. "Can we go in and look around?" he asked.

"They're closed on Tuesdays. But I promise we'll come back tomorrow," Mr. Briar replied. "Hey! Postcards!"



He and Mrs. Briar walked over to a street stand that sold souvenirs. Ella went over to the stand next to it, which sold jewelry. Ethan joined his sister just as a line of police cars sped by, their sirens blaring noisily. The sirens in Paris sounded different from the sirens back home!

Ella picked up a sparkly bracelet. "This is really pretty," she said to the woman behind the stand. "Did you make it?"

The woman didn't reply at first. Glancing past the twins, she twirled her long red hair nervously. She wore a ring that looked like a coiled silver snake.

"No, *mademoiselle*. I did not make it. Please give it back!" She grabbed the bracelet out of Ella's hands.

"Ella! Ethan! We'd better move on if we want to get to the Luxembourg Gardens by lunchtime," Mr. Briar interrupted. He held a bag of postcards in his hand.



As they walked away, the woman reached for her cell phone and dialed a number. She said something in French. Her voice sounded urgent.

"Well she's not very friendly," Ella whispered to Ethan.

Ethan nodded. "I know! I hope she's not here tomorrow when we come back," he murmured.





CHAPTER 3

A New Mystery

Back at their apartment, the twins decided to check their e-mail before their homeschooling lesson.

Four messages popped up on the laptop screen. The first two were from Hannah, Ella's best friend from back home. The third was from Ethan's best friend, Theo.

The last message was a note from Grandpa Harry. How exciting!

Ella clicked on his e-mail. Ethan leaned over her shoulder as they read it together:

To: ethanella@eemail.com

From: gpaharry@eemail.com

Subject: Sweets for my sweets

Hello, my dears. Bienvenue à Paris! (That means "Welcome to Paris!"')

I hope you are enjoying the City of Light! Speaking of light, the Eiffel Tower has a special light show every night. Make sure you catch it. It is magical.

Did you know that I asked your Grandma Lucy to marry me in Paris? I was studying at the university to be an archaeologist. I asked her while we were having crepes at a very special crêperie owned by my friends on Rue de Fleur. ("Rue" means "street" and "Fleur" means "flower.")

Perhaps you will get a chance to go to this crepe shop. But a warning: Its name and exact address are a secret. Also, you must give a password at the door. It is "faucon."

Good luck, my dears! When you find the crêperie, please tell Jean and Jacqueline that their old friend Harry Robinson says bonjour! (That means "hello.")

Love,

Grandpa Harry



"A secret crepe shop?!" Ella exclaimed. "We have to find it!"

"Yeah, but how? We don't know what it's called—or where it is," Ethan pointed out.

"We don't know *yet*." Ella reached for her bag. She pulled out her notebook, which was purple with a shiny gold spine.

"What are you doing?" Ethan asked.

"Writing down our clues, *of course*," Ella replied, rolling her eyes.

Grandpa Harry had given Ella the notebook before the Briars left on their big trip. He'd told her that she might use it for solving mysteries. He had also given Ethan a going-away present —a gold coin with a picture of a hawk on it.

Ella opened her notebook to a clean page and wrote:

Rue de Fleur
Password: Faucon

Then an idea came to her. "Follow me!" she told her brother.

Ella closed the laptop and ran down the hall to her room, clutching her notebook. Ethan ran after her. Once there, she got *Les Secrets de Paris* from her bookshelf. She found the page with the handwriting on it and then showed it to Ethan.



"Paris is full of secret places that you will not find in any guidebook," Ethan read out loud. "What does that mean?"

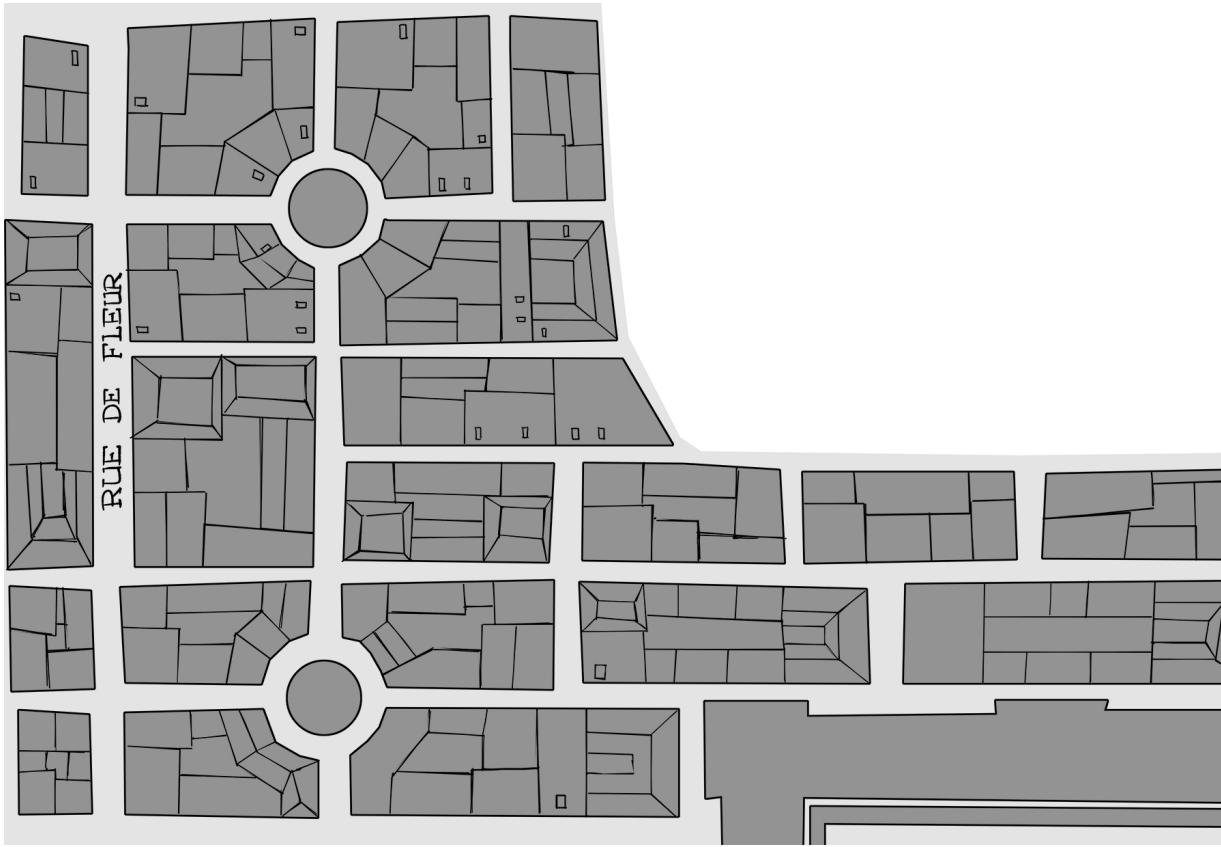
"I'm not sure. But maybe Grandpa Harry's secret crepe shop is in this book!" Ella suggested.

The twins hunched over the old book and went through it page by page. But it was all in French, and they couldn't understand it.



At the end of the book was a map of the city. Ethan scanned it quickly. "Rue de Flandre—was that the street he mentioned?" he asked Ella.

Ella glanced at her notebook. "No. It was Rue de Fleur. F-L-E-U-R."



The twins continued scanning the map. After a moment, Ethan found the street—Rue de Fleur!

“Here it is!” he practically shouted.

“It’s near some big building called the Musée du Louvre,” Ella noted. “That must be French for the Louvre Museum—”

“Where we’re going tomorrow,” Ethan said eagerly. “We can find the secret crepe shop then!”



CHAPTER 4

Stolen!

The next morning Mr. Briar and the twins returned to the Louvre.

“The secret crepe shop must be somewhere near here,” Ethan whispered to Ella as he looked around. “Now we just need to get away from Dad so we can find it.”

Ella frowned suspiciously. “Get away from Dad? How are we going to do that?”



“We’ll find a way,” Ethan said with a sly smile.

The Briars entered the museum. There were so many things to look at! Ella’s favorite was the marble statue of Nike, the Greek goddess of victory. Ethan loved the remains of the fortress that used to be there. It was almost like going back in time to the Middle Ages!

After the fortress, they went to a crowded room that was filled with people. In the middle of the room was small portrait of a woman with long brown hair. There were mountains in the background.

"This is probably the most famous painting in this museum. It's called the *Mona Lisa*," Mr. Briar explained. "Do you know what's cool? No matter where you're standing, she always seems to be looking at you."



"No way!" Ethan said, surprised.

Curious, he walked ten steps to the left. The woman in the painting was still staring at him. He took ten more steps. She was *still* staring at him.

"Dad's right. You try it!" Ethan told Ella.

Ella repeated Ethan's steps. "That's spooky!" she said after a moment. "Is the painting haunted?"



Mr. Briar chuckled. "I don't think so. Although there *is* a mystery surrounding the painting. Some experts think the *Mona Lisa* isn't who she appears to be, and—"

His words were drowned out by a loud alarm. A voice rang out over the speakers: "The museum is now closed. Please exit the museum."

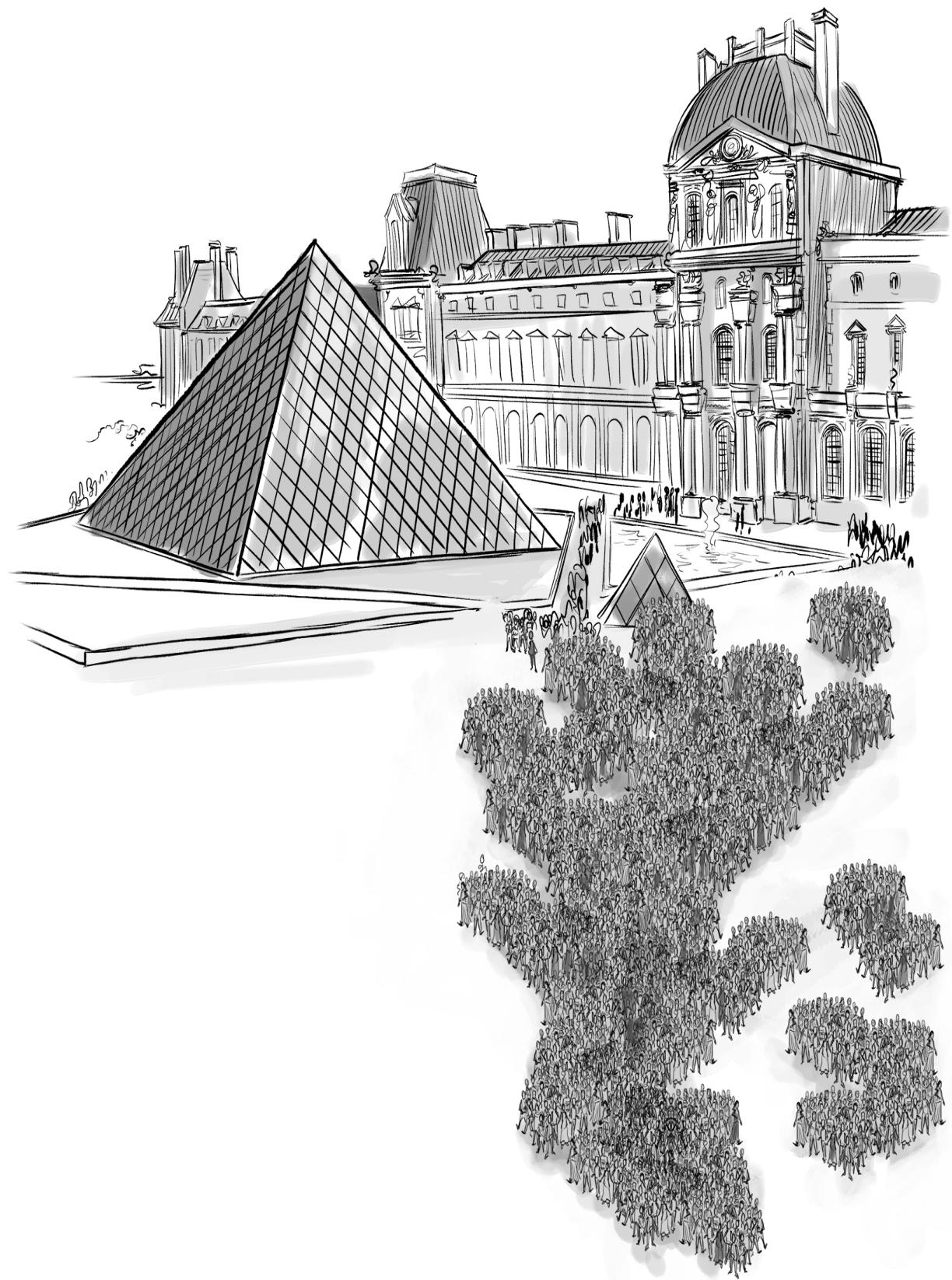
Ethan glanced around. Everyone in the room was heading toward the doors. "What's going on?" he asked his dad.

"I'm not sure. It's probably just an electrical problem or something," Mr. Briar replied with a shrug. "Not to fear! I have more fun things planned for us after this!"

The twins followed their dad into the jam-packed hallway. As they neared the staircase, they overheard two women speaking in English.

"I just asked one of the museum guards. He said that an incredibly valuable painting has been stolen!" one of the women said.





CHAPTER 5

The Thief Leaves a Clue

"Ella? Did you hear what that woman said?" Ethan whispered.

Ella nodded. "Yes, a painting was stolen. That's awful!"

"I wonder if the thief is still here," Ethan said.

They glanced at their dad to see if he had heard, too. But he was busy reading his guidebook.



The three of them exited the museum. People had spilled out into the courtyard. A juggler entertained a crowd in front of one

of the fountains.

Mr. Briar pulled his map out of his messenger bag. "Kids, I'm going to ask someone for directions to the Arc de Triomphe," he called out. "It's a monument that was built in honor of French soldiers. We can spend the rest of the morning there." He added, "Stay here. I'll be right back."

In the courtyard, a police officer was talking to a museum guard. Ethan walked over to them.

"Ethan! What are you doing?" Ella called out.

"I want to find out about the stolen painting," Ethan replied. "Come on!"

Ella sighed and trailed after her brother. When they got within earshot, Ethan stopped and pretended to tie his shoes. Ella pretended to get something out of her bag.

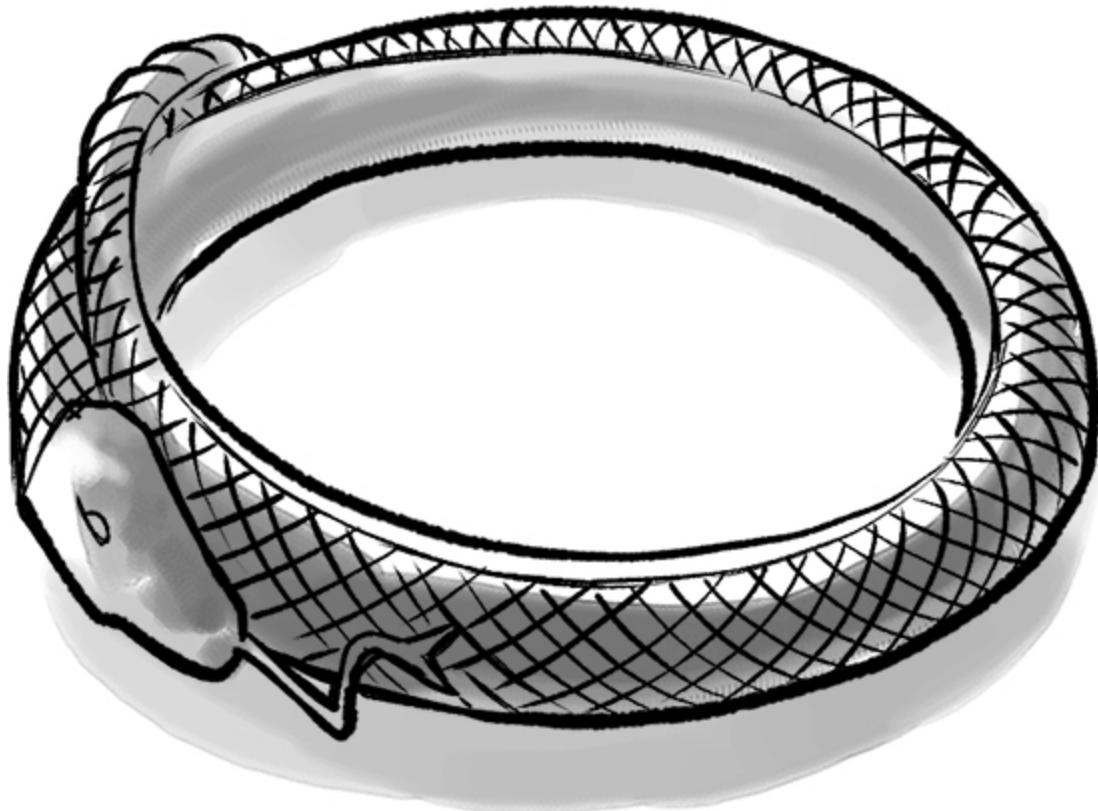
But the police officers and the guard were speaking in French. "It's no use. Let's go," Ethan said, turning away.



Ella started to turn, too—then did a double take. The guard was showing the police officers a silver ring.

It was shaped like a coiled-up snake.

Ella frowned. The ring looked familiar. Where had she seen it before?



“The guard is telling the police officers that the thief left that ring behind,” Ella overheard someone say.



“Kids, there you are!”

Mr. Briar rushed up. “You’ll never believe it. I ran into my old friend Leo from college. He wants to have coffee at that café over there. Is that okay with you? We can go to the Arc de Triomphe afterward.”

“Um, sure,” Ella replied.

“No!” Ethan blurted out at the same time. “Ella and I really want to watch that juggler. Please?”

Ella stared at her brother. What was he up to now?

Mr. Briar pushed his glasses up on his nose and checked out the juggler. “Hmm. He *is* very good! All right. I won’t be long. Stay right here, and don’t wander off.”

“We won’t!” Ethan promised.

As soon as Mr. Briar was gone, Ethan grabbed Ella’s arm. “This is our chance to find Grandpa Harry’s secret crepe shop!” he told her.



Ella thought for a moment. "Okay," she said. "But first, there's something else I want to do. Can we go back to the jewelry stand from yesterday?"

"To look at more bracelets? No way!" Ethan complained.

Ella shook her head. "Not bracelets! I think I found a clue."



Ethan's hazel eyes widened. "What kind of clue?"

"The thief left a silver ring shaped like a snake," Ella explained. "The woman at the jewelry stand was wearing a ring like that. Remember? Maybe she's connected to the missing painting somehow!"



CHAPTER 6

A Speedy Getaway

A few minutes later, the twins found the row of street vendors from the day before. Tourists gathered around the stands, shopping for postcards and souvenirs.

Ethan and Ella spotted the red-haired woman right away. “There she is!” Ethan said excitedly.

The woman was talking on her cell phone and putting all her jewelry into a black briefcase, as though she was closing up for the day. The twins moved closer, pretending to look at miniature Eiffel Towers at the next stand.

The woman spoke in French, so it was impossible to understand her. But at one point, she said something that sounded like: “Rue de Fleur.”

“Did she just say ‘Rue de Fleur’?” Ethan asked Ella. “Isn’t that . . . ?”

Ella pulled her purple notebook out of her backpack and flipped through it quickly. “Yes! That’s the very same street Grandpa Harry’s secret crepe shop is on!”



"We'd better talk to her right away," Ethan suggested. "Maybe she knows something about the missing painting *and* the secret crepe shop!"

But before the twins could question her, the woman took off down the street, clutching her briefcase. She jumped into a waiting car with tinted windows. The door slammed closed, and the car sped away.



"Oh no!" Ella cried. "Now what do we do?"

"I think we should try to find Rue de Fleur," Ethan said, watching the car weave in and out of traffic.

* * *

"We turn right here," Ella said, squinting at the map she had brought along. "Or is it left?"

Ethan leaned over to take a look. "I think we have to turn right when we get to this other street," he said, pointing.

The twins made it to the neighborhood where Rue de Fleur was supposed to be. But standing on a crowded corner, they weren't sure which way to go next.

"Where are the street signs?" Ella asked, glancing around.



Ethan frowned. His sister was right. Paris didn't have any street signs!

And then he noticed something interesting. The buildings at the corners of the intersection had small blue signs on the sides. The signs had fancy writing on them.

"That one says 'Rue de Rivoli,'" Ethan read. "*Those* must be the street signs!"

Ella nodded. "Good! Let's follow those!"

The twins crisscrossed their way until they finally reached Rue de Fleur. It was a small street lined on either side by apartments and little stores, including several flower shops. Buckets of colorful blooms covered one section of the sidewalk.

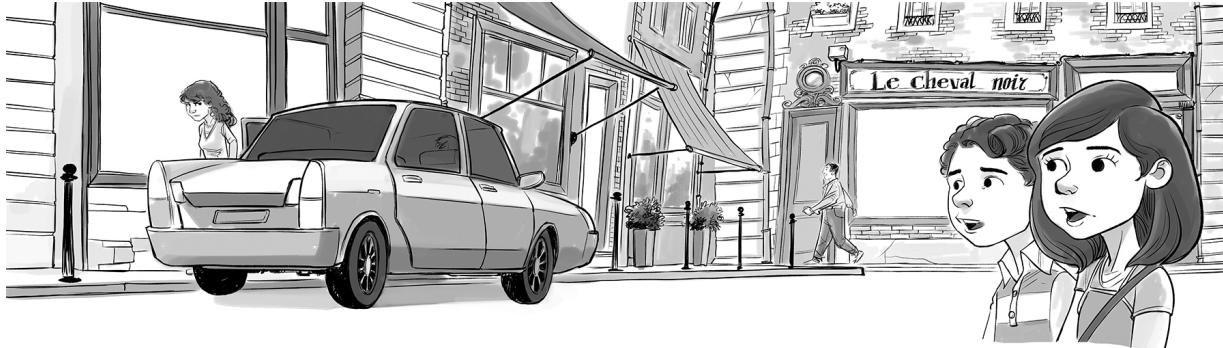
"Yes! We found Rue de Fleur!" Ethan said excitedly. "Now all we have to do is find the secret crepe shop. And the jewelry lady, too."

Just then, a car with tinted windows raced down the narrow street, its tires squealing.



“Look out!” Ella shouted.

She and Ethan flattened themselves against a building to avoid the speeding car.



The car screeched to a stop and dropped off a passenger before driving away.

It was the red-haired woman!



CHAPTER 7

The Secret Crepe Shop

The red-haired woman rushed up to a brick apartment building. She had her briefcase with her. Using a key, she opened the front door and disappeared inside.

“Did she see us?” Ella asked Ethan nervously.

Ethan shook his head. “I don’t think so. Let’s follow her!”

“Follow her *where*?” Ella demanded.

“Just trust me,” Ethan said.

He inched up to the first-floor window of the brick building. Ella followed close behind. The curtains on the windows were lacy and sheer, which made it easy to see in.

The twins pressed their faces to the glass—and gasped.

Inside the apartment, three people sat around a table, arguing in loud voices. One of them was the red-haired woman. The other two were men.

Propped up on the table was a beautiful painting framed in gold! It was a portrait of a little girl with a dog.



Ella jabbed Ethan with her elbow. "That must be the stolen painting!" she whispered fiercely.

The red-haired woman opened her briefcase and spilled her jewelry onto the table.

Ethan gasped. "Maybe the bracelets and stuff are stolen, too," he said. "I bet she was trying to sell them at her stand!"



Suddenly, one of the men pushed back his chair, stood up, and started for the front door. For a split second, the twins watched in horror as the doorknob turned. They were about to be discovered!

"We have to hide. Now!" Ella cried.

She grabbed Ethan and pulled him away from the window. Glancing around frantically, she saw an open doorway one building over. "Quick! In here!"

The twins made a mad dash for the building and ducked inside. They slammed the door behind them.

"Phew, that was close," Ethan said breathlessly.

"*Bonjour?*"

The twins whirled around. A tiny woman with curly gray hair stood behind a counter. She peered at them from over the top of her glasses.





“Mot de passé, s'il vous plaît,” the woman said with a stern expression.

The twins stared at each other.

“Mot de passé,” the woman repeated.

Just then, Ella noticed a familiar sweet, buttery smell.

Ethan seemed to notice it too.

“Crepes!” they said in unison. They had found Grandpa Harry’s secret crepe shop!

“Oh! You are Americans?” The woman’s expression relaxed into a smile. “I am sorry, I did not realize. Password, please.”

“Get your notebook. Get your notebook,” Ethan told Ella impatiently.



"I know that," Ella snapped. She reached into her backpack and pulled out her notebook. "Faucon," she said to the woman after a moment. "Did I pronounce that right?"

"Yes, you pronounced it just fine," the woman replied, still smiling at them. She pushed open a door behind the counter and waved them inside. "Come this way, please."





CHAPTER 8

Heroes

On the other side of the door was one of the most wonderful sights the twins had ever seen!

It was a tiny room that was barely bigger than their tree house back in Brookeston. It had a few tables and chairs. A man stood at a stove, cooking a thin, golden pancake in a black skillet. He flipped the crepe over once, twice—then put it on a plate. He sprinkled it with powdered sugar.



"Jean, we have customers," the woman announced to the man.

The man turned. He had bushy gray hair and a mustache, and he reminded Ethan of Grandpa Harry. "Merci, Jacqueline! Bonjour, mes petits! Hello, my children! What can I make for you today?" he asked in a merry voice.

"I . . . we . . . our grandfather sent us," Ella managed to say after a moment.

"Oh? Who is your *grand-père*?" Jean asked curiously.

"Harry Robinson. He said you were friends," Ethan piped up.

Jacqueline gasped. "You are Harry Robinson's grandchildren? We have not seen him in years! How is our dear friend Harry?"

"He's good. We miss him," Ella said timidly. "Oh, and he says hi," she remembered.



Jacqueline walked over to a wall covered with old photographs. She took one down. "This is a picture of Harry and Lucy when they were at the university," she said fondly.

The twins stared at the picture in amazement. Here they were across the world in a secret crepe shop, and it was as though Grandpa Harry were with them!



In the picture, he had thick black hair. Grandma Lucy had a long blond ponytail and looked a lot like their mom.

The picture in its pretty gold frame reminded Ethan of something. *Frame . . .*

“Painting!” he suddenly burst out. “We have to tell you about the painting!”

“What painting?” Jacqueline asked, confused.

“Some thieves stole a painting from the Louvre Museum this morning,” Ella piped up. “They’re hiding it next door. We just saw it!”

“I heard about this on the news just now,” Jean said, reaching for his phone. “We’d better call the police right away!”

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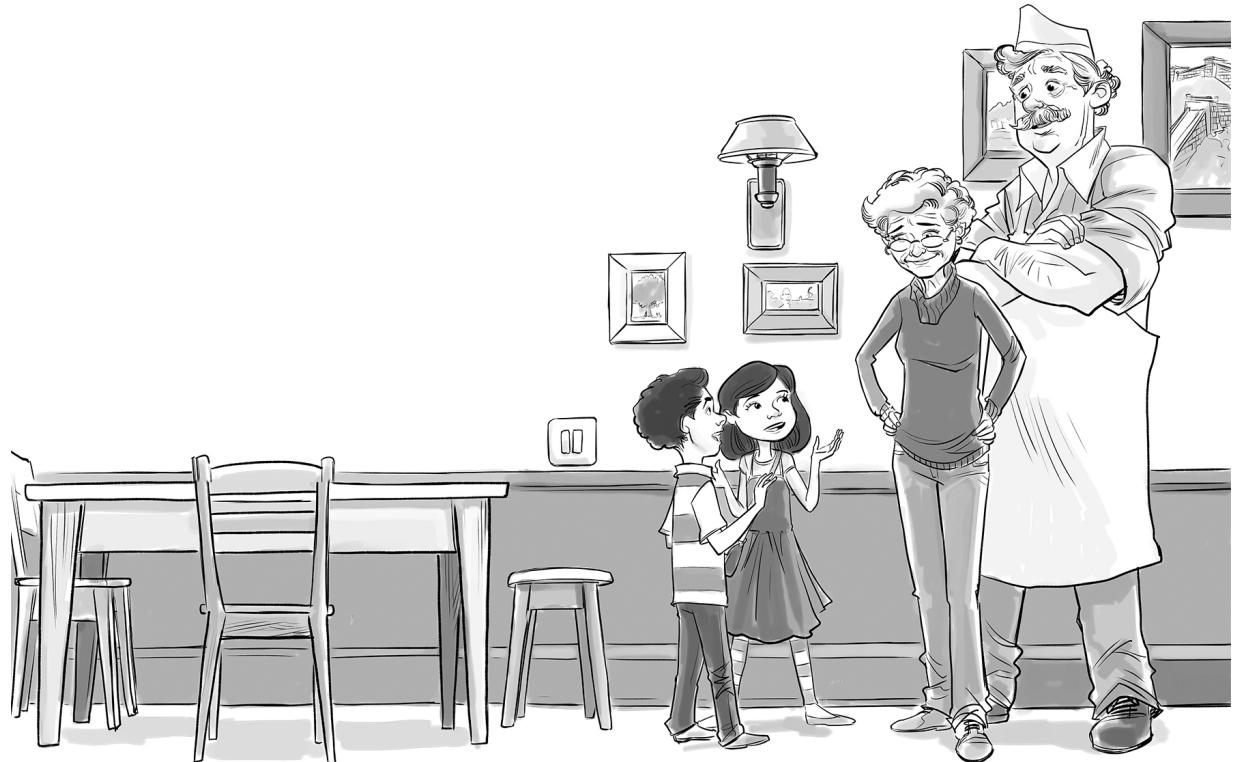


Ethan, Ella, Jean, and Jacqueline watched from the window of the crepe shop as police cars pulled up in front of the brick building. A few minutes later, some police officers brought the red-haired woman and the two men out in handcuffs. Another police officer carried the painting and jewelry.

“You are heroes!” Jean praised the twins. “Everyone in Paris will want to thank you for what you have done!”

Ethan shook his head quickly. “No. It has to be a secret! We’re not even supposed to be here!”

Jacqueline looked at the twins, her eyebrows raised. “Oh?”



The twins explained about sneaking away from the Louvre while their dad had coffee with his college friend. "He'll be back any second now. We should go," Ella finished, looking at the clock nervously.

"But you can't leave until you've had some of my famous crepes!" Jean said, picking up his spatula.

Ethan glanced hopefully at Ella. She nodded.

"Yes, please!" they said in unison.



"Why do you keep your crepe shop a secret?" Ethan asked the couple.

Jacqueline wiped her hands on her apron and smiled as if remembering something. "Many years ago, Jean became known as the finest crepe maker in Paris. But he wasn't interested in becoming rich and famous. He just wanted to make crepes for friends and loyal customers."



"So we decided to start this little shop and give out the password to only a few people," Jean continued. "Our password has been the same for almost fifty years—*faucon*, or hawk." He added, "It's the same password that was used by a secret society that met here many years ago."

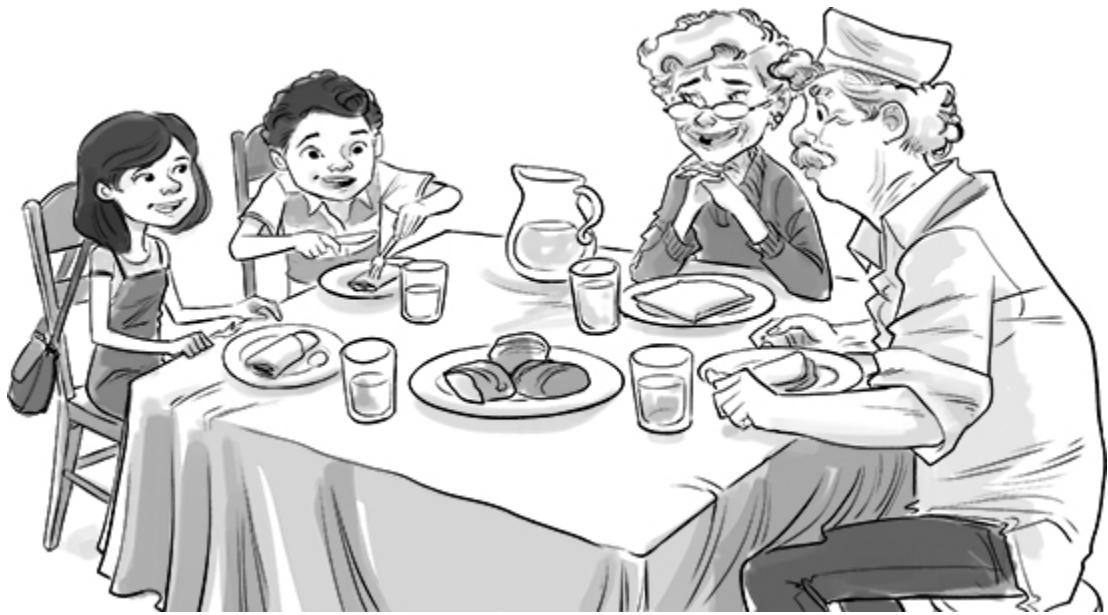


Hawk? Ethan reached into his pocket and pulled out the gold coin Grandpa Harry had given him as a going-away present. It had a picture of a hawk on one side.

Was it a coincidence?

Ethan was about to ask Jean and Jacqueline about their password. He also wanted to know more about the secret society.

But before Ethan could say anything, Jean held out two plates. *"Et voilà!* Here! Please eat these crepes while they are hot! These were your grandparents' favorites—lemon and powdered sugar."



The twins took the crepes and bit into them. They were warm and delicious and just the right combination of sweet and tart. Ethan had thought croissants were his new favorite food. But now he knew it was definitely crepes!

“We really have to go,” Ella said, nudging Ethan and pointing at the clock.

The twins finished up their crepes and said good-bye to Jean and Jacqueline.

“Please come see us again next time you are in Paris,” Jacqueline told them.

Ethan and Ella waved good-bye and promised they would.





CHAPTER 9

The Eiffel Tower!

That night, Ella sat down at the laptop to send Grandpa Harry an e-mail. Ethan sat next to her, turning his gold coin over in his hand.

Dear Grandpa Harry,

Guess what? We found your secret crepe shop! Mr. Jean made us lemon and powdered sugar crepes. They were yummy.

Guess what else? We solved a mystery! Some thieves stole a painting from the Louvre Museum. We discovered them next door to the crepe shop. Mr. Jean called the police.

We learned that the secret password to the crepe shop is the French word for "hawk." Does it have anything to do with the hawk on the gold coin?

Tonight, Mom and Dad are taking us to the Eiffel Tower to see the light show you told us about!

We miss you! Au revoir! (That means "good-bye" in French!)

Love,

Ella and Ethan

Their parents came into the living room just then. Mr. Briar wore a T-shirt with the *Mona Lisa* on it. "Let's go to the Eiffel Tower!" he said eagerly. "Hey, I just heard some news on the radio. Did you know there was a big art theft at the Louvre Museum today? I guess that's why we had to leave. They caught the thieves with the help of an anonymous tip."

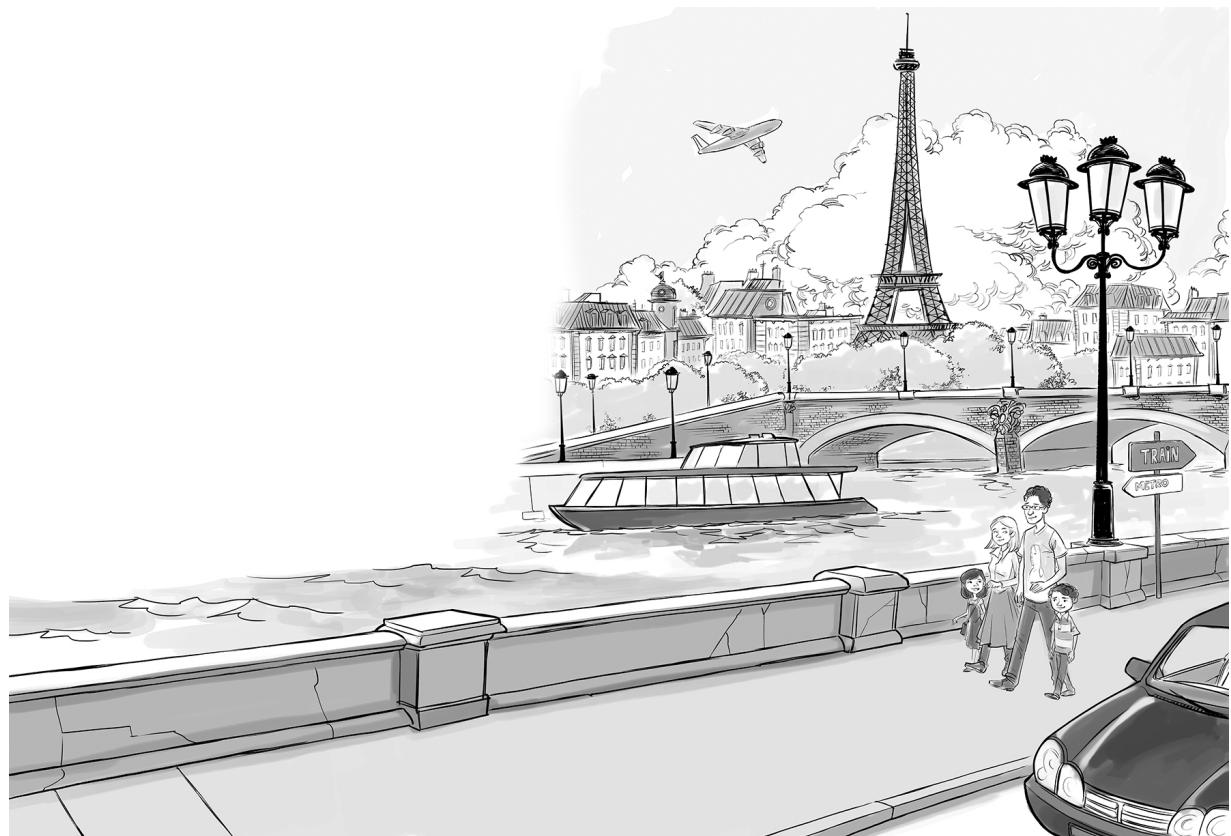
Ella blinked innocently. "Really?"

"Wow. We didn't know!" Ethan added with a grin.

Mrs. Briar patted her kids on their heads. "We should go. The light show will be starting very soon."

As they headed out the door, the twins exchanged high fives. They'd solved the mystery of the stolen painting and found Grandpa Harry's secret crepe shop all in one day. And now they were about to see a light show at the Eiffel Tower.

Could Paris get any better?



GLOSSARY

Au revoir = Good-bye

Bienvenue = Welcome

Bonjour = Hello

boulangerie = bakery

crêperie = crepe shop

faucon = hawk

fleur = flower

fromagerie = cheese shop

grand-père = grandfather

Les Secrets de Paris = The Secrets of Paris

Mademoiselle = Miss

Merci = Thank you

mes petits = my children

musée = museum

patisserie = cake shop

rue = street

S'il vous plaît = Please

Voilà = There is/There's why

*All words are in French.



"I miss Grandpa Harry's waffles," Ella Briar said with a pout.

"I miss the blueberry muffins from Petunia Bakery," her brother, Ethan, added.

The twins frowned at their plates, which were piled high with fried rice, pickled vegetables, and some foods they didn't recognize. The Briar family was having breakfast at their hotel, the Beijing Imperial. The large dining room was decorated with red and gold furniture and paintings of swirly dragons.

"But, kids, we're having an eating adventure!" their dad, Andrew, said as he reached for his chopsticks. "Check out those delicious-looking *bao*!"

The Briars had been traveling around the world for more than a month now. The reason for their big trip was Mrs. Briar's

job. The *Brookeston Times* newspaper had hired her to write a travel column, *Journeys with Jo!*

They had already visited two cities in Europe: Venice, Italy, and Paris, France. After that, they had moved on to Shanghai, China. And just yesterday, they had arrived in Beijing, the capital of China.

“So what are we doing today?” Ethan asked. He stuck his chopsticks in his dark brown hair and made them stand up like antennas. Ella giggled. Her brother looked like a bug!

Mrs. Briar scrolled through her cell phone. “I just got an e-mail from my editor. He wants me to interview some people over at the National Art Museum. I’m afraid I’ll be tied up until dinnertime.”

Ella’s face fell. So did Ethan’s. That was another thing they missed—spending time with their mom. She was always busy writing or doing research for her column. The twins were mostly with their dad, either sightseeing or having their homeschooling lessons.

Mrs. Briar reached across the table to squeeze their hands. “I’m sorry I can’t hang out with you today. But guess what? The four of us are doing something really special tomorrow!”

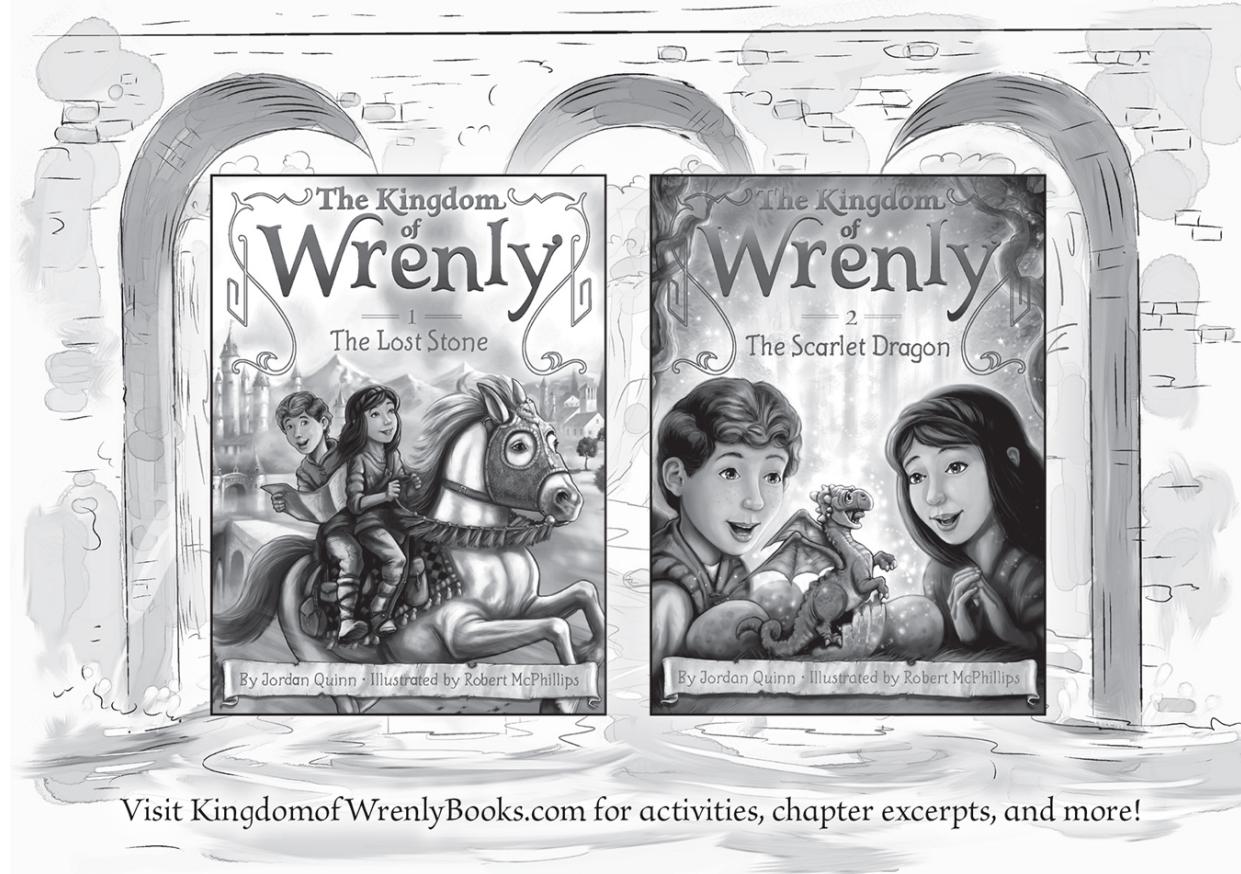
Ella perked up. “What is it?”

“We’re visiting the Forbidden City!” Mrs. Briar told them.

The twins exchanged a glance. The Forbidden City? They didn’t know what that was, but it certainly sounded mysterious!

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HARPER PARIS

loves to travel. Her favorite cities in the world are Paris (like her name!) and New York City. She has collected many souvenirs on her travels, including a good-luck coin from Japan and a reindeer-horn pendant from Sweden. She also loves mysteries. When she was a kid, she read Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew books after bedtime with a flashlight. She now lives with her family (including two cats and a bunny, who are not good travelers) in Ithaca, New York.

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